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SUBJECT: SLOVENIAN FM LEANS FORWARD ON W. BALKANS,
AFGHANISTAN, GUANTANAMO

Classified By: CDA Brad Freden, Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

Summary

¶1. (C) During a July 22 discussion with CDA, Foreign Minister Zbogar focused on the Western Balkans, stressing that Slovenia remained concerned about Bosnia and Herzegovina, while its relationship with Serbia was deepening despite Slovenia's strong support for Kosovo. Zbogar hoped that a July 31 meeting between PM Pahor and Croatian PM Kosor would help diffuse the bitter dispute over Croatia's EU accession talks; he would appreciate U.S. support for encouraging Croatia to reengage with the EU's Rehn process. Zbogar also explained that the MFA and Ministry of Defense are exploring how Slovenia can develop its involvement in civilian assistance in Afghanistan and Pakistan. He indicated that the MFA and Ministry of Interior continued to review issues related to Slovenia's possible acceptance of Guantanamo detainees and he will meet with S/E Fried in Washington on July 28. End Summary.

The Western Balkans

¶2. (C) Mentioning that he had now been in office for eight months and was getting a good picture of what Slovenia could do in foreign policy and how it could add value internationally, FM Zbogar noted that it was a good time for a meeting. Slovenia's foreign policy priority was its backyard - the Western Balkans. It remained concerned about the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. While Slovenia had long advocated for EU visa liberalization in the region, it now wanted to work to minimize the gap before visa liberalization for Bosnia. On July 28, Slovenia will send a team of experts who had worked on Slovenia's effort to join the Schengen zone to identify issues and problems in order to help Bosnia navigate the process. He added that Slovenia might later work with the U.K. in this push.

¶3. (C) Zbogar stated that Slovenia was developing good relations with Serbia, a country critical to stability in the Balkans. Across the board, ministries were establishing and developing contacts. He noted that trade and business ties were expanding rapidly. At the same time, Slovenia was balancing its relationship with Kosovo. Although Serbia had protested when Slovenia filed its first ICJ brief on behalf of Kosovo, so far it had not reacted to Slovenia's longer second brief. Slovenia would continue to devote a significant portion of its foreign assistance budget to projects and people-to-people contacts in Kosovo.

Slovenia/Croatia

¶ 4. (C) FM Zbogar said that PM Borut Pahor and Croatian PM Jadranka Kosor planned to meet on Friday, July 31, in Croatia. Indicating that he did not expect a decisive break-through, Zbogar noted that they would have a better understanding of how the situation was looking once the prime ministers met. He hoped they could agree to continue talks between the two FMs away from the media limelight. He added that this was the advice they were receiving from the EU presidency. He emphasized that the Rehn process had achieved a lot of progress and, except for the Drnovsek-Racan agreement, the two countries were never so close. "It would be a pity to drop everything now and start from who knows where," Zbogar concluded.

¶ 5. (C) Zbogar commented that he had heard from the Croatians that they were not ready to return to the Rehn process. Stressing that the U.S. had important influence in Zagreb, Zbogar requested U.S. support for the EU-led process. He again noted domestic Slovenian sensitivity to the myth - propagated by some in Croatia - that it had ratified Croatia's NATO accession only because of U.S. pressure and U.S. pressure on Slovenia was all that was needed to get Croatia into the EU. He welcomed U.S. support for the EU process. The FM suggested that Slovenia would be willing to look at any ideas U.S. lawyers might have to redraft problematic clauses in the latest Rehn agreement.

Afghanistan/Pakistan

¶ 6. (C) Zbogar stated that Slovenia was examining how it could develop its involvement in Afghanistan/Pakistan. He

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explained that the MFA supported the Ministry of Defense's proposal to lead an Operational Mentoring and Liaison Team (OMLT) in 2010 and to lift its caveats. In addition, Slovenia was contributing funds to the Afghan National Army and also to the Pakistan SWAT project. Slovenia was developing its plans to work in civilian assistance; he added that one priority would be women's empowerment. He lamented that the costs were too high for Slovenia to open an office now in Afghanistan, but Slovenia planned for its Afghanistan coordinator to travel often to Herat, where Slovenian civil and military efforts were focused.

Deepening our Bilateral Economic Relationship

¶ 7. (C) FM Zbogar shares our goal of deepening our economic and commercial ties. He agreed that the prospects for Aspect Energy, a U.S. company that would like to invest in natural gas exploration in northeast Slovenia, are good so far. He thought that Aspect was the most promising U.S. investment on the horizon. He was more reticent about the prospect of Slovenia building a second nuclear power plant, which Westinghouse hopes to supply. Zbogar explained that the government would not even begin discussing the possibility until 2010.

Guantanamo Detainees

¶ 8. (C) CDA followed up on a July 17 telephone conversation between S/E Fried and FM Zbogar about Slovenia accepting Guantanamo detainees. CDA asked about S/E Fried coming to Ljubljana on Thursday, July 30, to discuss concerns and review possible cases. FM Zbogar explained that July 30 would not be possible because he would be returning from the U.S. mid-day, going directly to join the government's last session before summer recess, and then would need to concentrate on finalizing preparations for PM Pahor's meeting with PM Kosor in Croatia the next day. Zbogar and Fried subsequently agreed to meet in Washington on July 28. The FM noted that he planned to meet with Interior Minister Kressal the afternoon of July 22 to go through issues and brief her

on his discussion with S/E Fried. The MoI was also inclined to support taking 1-2 detainees, but needed to sort out how to make it procedurally possible. He commented that there were certain laws, e.g. relating to the asylum process, that the government might have to navigate or even change.

FREDEN